

WEIGHT LOSS

weapons

Appetite, cravings, and metabolism are all controlled by hormones. Here's how to make them work for – not against – you.



1 MANAGE APPETITE HORMONES There is more to dieting than just willpower. Your digestive system is capable of synthesising an array of hormones that regulate appetite. These hormones are part of a complex system that evolved to help the body deal with periods of famine. Two of the most potent hunger hormones are leptin and ghrelin. Leptin is secreted by fat cells and sends a signal to your brain when you have eaten enough. Overweight individuals can develop leptin resistance, making them unresponsive to the controlling effects of leptin. Ghrelin is produced in the stomach and has an opposing effect; it drives appetite, stimulating the desire for high-calorie foods.

Expert tip: To kick patterns of overeating, focus on mindful eating. Practise portion control and select foods to delight the senses, like colourful vegetables, juicy fruits and deliciously aromatic curries.

2 THE STRESS CONNECTION Do you wake up dog-tired and then struggle through the day? These are the tell-tale signs of adrenal fatigue, a state of exhaustion caused by low adrenal function. The adrenal glands regulate your critical fight-or-flight stress hormones. Over time, too much stress weakens the adrenals. Individuals with this condition usually overeat in an attempt to bolster lagging energy and then end up gaining weight. In addition cortisol, the main stress hormone, tells your body where to store fat, with greater amounts stored as visceral fat around the middle which is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Expert tip: A plentiful supply of B group vitamins, particularly pantothenic acid (vitamin B5), can help to recharge the adrenals.

3 INSULIN FOR BLOOD SUGAR CONTROL A key goal for enhancing weight loss is to improve insulin activity. Insulin is a hormone released by the pancreas in response to elevated sugar in the blood. A diet high in refined carbohydrates can cause the pancreas to secrete vast amounts of insulin. Combined with a lack of physical activity, this contributes to blood sugar problems. An insulin-controlling plan is needed. Have three meals of lean protein and complex carbohydrates throughout the day to stabilise your blood sugar. Choose foods in their whole, natural state and go for high fibre options. Getting 6-8 hours of sleep also improves insulin action.

Expert tip: Chromium is an essential nutrient for blood sugar control. Chromium nicotinate and picolinate supplement forms are more bioavailable.

4 COULD IT BE YOUR THYROID? A well functioning thyroid is crucial to keep your metabolism humming. Thyroid hormones are like a throttle, boosting your body's ability to burn calories. An underactive thyroid, or hypothyroidism, will slow metabolism to a crawl, making it impossible to lose weight. If you are worried about hypothyroidism, a



The good oil

According to a study in *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, palmitic acid, a common saturated fatty acid found in dairy foods and beef, travels to the brain and causes your body to ignore appetite-suppressing signals from the hormones leptin and insulin. "We've shown that someone's entire brain chemistry can change in a short period, and that eating saturated fat actually causes you to eat more," says researcher Dr Deborah Clegg. Eating oleic acid – found in olive and grapeseed oil – does not have the same effect.

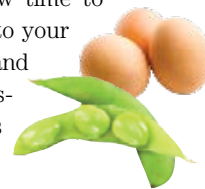
fad diet won't work. Restricting calories inhibits the enzyme that triggers thyroid hormone activity. This is the body's natural response to conserve fuel during periods of starvation. Instead, choose thyroid-nourishing foods to achieve slow, steady weight loss. Highly refined soy foods, such as soy milk and soy oil, harm the thyroid and should be strictly avoided.

Expert tip: Bladderwrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*) is a prized thyroid tonic traditionally prescribed to treat weight gain associated with hypothyroidism. This herb is a rich source of iodine, a mineral essential to thyroid hormone production.

5 GET HAPPY If you suffer food cravings that are too hard to ignore, you may have a neurochemical imbalance that triggers compulsive eating. Serotonin is the body's primary mood-regulating hormone; it also affects your appetite, and low levels can result in powerful desires – even uncontrollable binges – for sugary foods.

Choosing nutritious, alkalising foods to nourish the nervous system can curb cravings. Serotonin is naturally produced from protein foods. Good sources of protein include fresh fish, lean red meat, organic poultry, organic eggs, or secondary protein such as wholegrains and legumes.

Expert tip: Emotions play a big part in food cravings. Allow time to relax and bring focus to your life. Yoga, meditation and deep breathing exercises are all powerful tools to calm the senses.



6 MENOPAUSAL WEIGHT GAIN This is a time when hormone fluctuations can lead to a range of symptoms, including weight gain. Many of my clients report that they feel tired, grumpy and weighed down by life. These are unmistakable signs that too much stress has been a dominant feature of their lives. They have relied on the energy of the stress hormones to help them cope, arriving at menopause with adrenal glands that are simply exhausted. When called upon to prop up declining oestrogen, the adrenals are unable to meet the demand. Without the adrenals' ability to buffer the impact of declining hormone production from the ovaries, these women experience more severe menopausal symptoms.

Expert tip: Withania (*Withania somnifera*) has long been used by Ayurvedic practitioners as a rejuvenating tonic. It is particularly indicated for nervous exhaustion due to long term stress.

did you know?

Studies suggest that even partial sleep deprivation elevates levels of cortisol, the stress hormone that causes us to crave high-calorie 'comfort food'.



LOUISE O'CONNOR is a leading naturopath who writes and educates on natural weight loss. Visit her at www.natural-weightloss-programs.com.